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Representations of Marriage in Women's Writings of the Romantic Period: Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Burney and Anna Barbauld

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TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

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Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo es el estudio de las representaciones del matrimonio en las obras de las escritoras románticas Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Burney y Anna Barbauld. Con este estudio se quiere demostrar que la visión de las mujeres sobre el matrimonio, en ocasiones, difiere con la establecida por el canon masculino y pretende reivindicar la situación desigual de la mujer en la sociedad británica del periodo romántico. Se podrá observar de este modo el conflicto entre el individuo y las normas sociales. Además, se dará visibilidad a las preocupaciones femeninas así como al carácter de su escritura, mencionando las influencias, similitudes y diferencias entre las tres autoras.

Abstract

The aim of this work is the study of the representations of marriage in the works of three romantic female writers, namely, Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Burney and Anna Barbauld. It is my purpose to show that women's vision about marriage differs, on occasions, with the one established by the male canon and intends to vindicate the unequal situation of women in the British society of the romantic period. Hence, the ongoing conflict between individual and social conventions will be observed. Moreover, women preoccupations and the nature of their writing will be given visibility, mentioning influences, similitudes and differences within the three authors.

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1. Introduction

The Romantic period has always been of great interest for scholars and critics; from literature to politics, from revolutionaries to pacific sentimentalist. There are certain words that come up to our minds when thinking about the Romantic Movement: passion, nature, sensibility, revolution...and seven names of male significant figures: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. However, when researching in the seminal scholarly works on English Romanticism female authors are hardly ever mentioned (Beers, 1899 and 1901; Abrams, 1975; Riasanovsky, 1995; Day, 1998; Mahoney, 2011). It seems that it is from the 80s and 90s onwards when female romantic authors start to be studied by scholars. For instance, when reading Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981), already in the content page, one female name appears: Jane Austen. Nevertheless, the research is even more successful when opening *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (Stuart Curran; 1993) a whole chapter devoted to "Women readers, women writers" (177-196) can be found. As a conclusion, according to the scarce, almost non-existent, appearance of women in scholarly works on English Romanticism, it is safe to assume that for a long time, the canon of romantic poetry and the description of its main themes are based on male interests and perceptions.

But, what about "the others"?¹ And by the others I mean all those eloquent female authors that were not lucky enough to gain the same recognition as their male counterparts. It would be substantial to know what they wrote about; what their interests were; if they had a "rebellious and reactionary" behaviour as their male fellows; and if they also wrote under the influence of male ideas and preoccupations. When studying Romantic literature, students are usually introduced to the two well-known female authors: Jane Austen and Mary Shelley. The students who are interested in the period may even know the Brontë Sisters and Mary Wollstonecraft. Curiously, it is very significant that the first ground-breaking critical feminist analysis, *The Mad Woman In the Attic* (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), studies the works of the Brontë Sister and Jane Austen; authors that wrote in the Romantic period. Even so, there are many names such as Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson etc. that still

¹ "The Other" makes reference to the book (and now theory) *Orientalism* (1978) written by Edward W. Saïd and can be defined as all those minorities groups who have been marginalised from Western conventions.

nowadays remain unknown for most of the audience. Thus, the vision of female romantic literature is very limited.

During the feminist upraising approaches in the late 80s and 90s, scholars and critics started to investigate those gaps in literature that belonged to minorities and oppressed groups. The “gap” in Female Romantic literature was being acknowledged and female preoccupations could be said to be a hot topic between researchers. Writers started to include in their romantic anthologies female discourses. What is more, there were some scholars who went deeper into the question and tried to draw a romantic canon of female authors. For instance, Joel Haefner’s *(De) Forming the Romantic Canon: The Case of Women Writers* (1993). As an example of whole anthologies written about women writers’ possibly the most well-know is Duncan Du’s *Romantic Women Poets* (1997) but there some others such as Jump, 1997; Feldman, 1997; Ashfield, 1997. Regarding the canon, scholars have analysed several works and authors in order draw parallelisms and preoccupations. Those studies deal with a wide range of topics: from general analysis of female authors such as Meena Alexander’s *Women in Romanticism* (1989); domestic issues such as Hayley R. Bordo’s *Anna Laetitia Barbauld and The Discourse of Washing* (1998) to feminist analysis on oppression and exclusion such as Julie A. Monroe’s *A Feminist Vindication of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1987). More recently the situation has been gaining again some critical attention: with the raise of feminist and equality movements, scholars still devote discussion and anthologies to female romantics. As an example of discussion, Caroline Franklin’s *The Female Romantics: Nineteenth-century Women Novelist and Byronism* (2010); and as an example of anthology, Antonio Ballesteros’ *Poesía Romántica Inglesa* (2011), which briefly describes the life and work of some female authors.

Thus, the methodology of this paperwork will be based on a feminist approach. As Peter Barry (2002) explains, feminist criticism focuses on rethinking the canon, revaluing women’s experience and examining representations of women in literature by men and women. (128) However, one of the most significant aspects of feminist criticism is the examination of power relations. As a result, my study will be focused on marriage since it represents an essential aspect with regards to power relations and women interest. Moreover, marriage has always been on the spotlight when thinking about a female canon. What is more, the examination of marriage representations by women plays a huge role in this paperwork with the aim of showing how it differs from male ones.

To my knowledge, although there are some studies about marriage during the romantic period (Walker 2009; Kremer, 2017), it has not been entirely analysed. Since most of the literature written in the past was created by men in a period of great religious influence, the only perspective we had about marriage was that given by them who considered it as the ultimate goal. Consequently, there are still many unanswered questions: what women's feelings towards marriage were; how explicitly those feelings were portrayed; which ways male and female visions on marriage differ in. The purpose of this essay is to give answer to all these questions and to show that, in fact, marriage did not always have positive connotations in female written works and, in some cases, it was even suffocating and traumatizing. With this goal in mind I have first performed some research work about women authors and their works that led me to select Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Burney and Anna Barbauld. My selection was based on diversity and similarity: that means I sought writers that dealt with marriage in their works but with a unique and different approach each. Thus, I will delve into the works of radical Mary Wollstonecraft, subtle Frances Burney and apparently "conservative" Anna Barbauld as regards their representations of marriage. I have decided to tackle first the figure of Mary Wollstonecraft given her importance regarding feminist studies and influence on posterior female authors.

The main aim of the work is to give visibility and analyse female authors. It is also substantial to closely study women's perceptions and feelings towards marriage as portrayed in their works, exploring the nature and character of it. In the process, negative psychological consequences in women will be exposed and discussed. I will construct my discussion on some scholarly works and my own analysis and interpretation of the authors' works. It will be essential to consider how different social backgrounds and constraints can shape the author's conceptions of marriage. As a result, our work aims at unveiling female preoccupations and interests different from those stereotypes created by men, so as to contribute to the creation of a new female canon of romantic authors around a common concern: the representation of marriage.

In the following pages I will first offer an introductory chapter in which I will explore the state of the art as regards romanticism in general and marriage in the romantic period. I will devote a chapter for each of the female romantic authors under study here. Hence, the third chapter will be dedicated to Mary Wollstonecraft's views on marriage and women's situation. Being the most radical and outspoken author, this part will be more theoretical. However, I will study her ideas as represented in some of

her literary works (*Mary: A Fiction* [1782] and *The Wrongs of Women* [1798]) instead of her well-known manifestos such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The fourth chapter will deal with marriage as represented in Frances Burney novels *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), *Camilla* (1796) and *The Wanderer* (1814). I will try to show that her novels of manners do not only accurately depicted women's designed place in society but also conceal a negative critique of it. The fifth chapter will focus on Anna Barbauld: my study will discuss how the conservative appearance of her writings conceal a subtle critique to conventions and the negative psychological consequences marriage had in her and other women. I will strongly focus on social and personal causes to prove that she subtly denounces the negativity of marriage on fear of being censored. Eventually my dissertation will conclude with a section devoted to summarising my main findings and to identify further possible lines of research.

2. The (Dis)Placement of Women Writers in the Romantic Period

The Romantic period has somehow been one of the most globally wide-spread and influential movements around the world. There have been many attempts to set a general period of time and definition for the Romantic Movement but it never accurately represents its nature in each different country: whereas Romanticism started in Germany and England in the late Eighteenth century, in Spain it reached its maximum splendour in the Nineteenth Century and lasted until the second half of it. Nevertheless, this period of time has been generally defined as a social, political and cultural movement that went from the very late XVII century to the first decades of the XIX century. Since our subject of concern is English literature, it is worth it trying to establish the defining features of English Romanticism. David Simpson (1993) states that to him, Romantic literature is

very roughly, the writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, sharing a general historical situation but not necessarily held together by any essential or perspective characteristics. (1)

However, there are other many authors that do not define Romanticism strictly in terms of period and context but rather sentiment, form and ideas. I consider myself to fit in this second group of people and their description of the Romanticism since, from my point of view, Romanticism is not only common history and social situation translated into literature; it is shared emotions, feelings, ideas and sense of revolution. For instance, in the fifth edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Drabble, 1985) the following definition can be found:

A literary movement and profound shift in sensibility, which took place in Britain and throughout Europe roughly between 1770 and 1848. Intellectually it marked a violent reaction to the Enlightenment. Politically it was inspired by the revolutions in America and France (...) Emotionally it expressed an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience (...) together with the sense of the infinite and transcendental. Socially it championed progressive causes...The stylistic keynote of Romanticism is intensity, and its watchword is "Imagination". (842-43)

Marilyn Butler accurately defines these two approaches to Romanticism by saying that one tries to understand the movement in terms of aesthetics, as a theory about the essence of art, whilst the other attempts to see it as a historical phenomenon associated with socio-political circumstances (8). Whist my approach aligns more with the second one, I consider both of them to be equally valid.

The Romantic Movement was born in a period of anger and exhaustion against those regimes in which the power resided in a small group of people belonging to the upper class society. It was in England, in the 1790s, when workers in the main urban centres of London, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester started to manifest for their rights. Together with them, writers found in literature a way to explore and defend their ideas. These writers did not only manifest their political views in their works but also proposed a new morality and understanding of the world based on emotions, nature and sensibility. Although at the time they did not address themselves as ‘the Romantics’, it was in the 1860s when seven names were accepted as the representatives of the movement: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley and Keats. They all, as Butler says, fitted into the notion of “the sensitive individual who rejected worldliness and even, this vulgar material world for a better” (3).

However, there were also many female writers in the scene who were not properly valued. It is an undeniable reality that women writers were excluded from the history of literature as a result of male settled conventions. To prove that, it is only necessary to think about the knowledge people have about male writing and female writing, and the quantity of male authors and female authors we know. As it was previously shown, knowledge about male writers outnumbers that of female ones. Since the outburst of feminist criticism, some authors started to identify this problem and pointed out to the need of studying female writers in order to rediscover canons and themes. For example, Isobel Armstrong, when reflecting about this issue states that we have had enough time to discover male discourse and how they think about politics, epistemology, language; yet it seems we didn’t have time to do that with female writers: “we are discovering who they are, but there are few ways of talking about them (...) a canon has not been yet found (...) we have not found a productive historical ways of thinking about female poets either” (15).

Women’s exclusion from the history of literature can be seen in many texts if we take a look two centuries back. For instance, Francis Jeffrey, Scottish literary critic,

published in 1829 a review about women records and, particularly, Felicia Hemans' work *The Forest Sanctuary* (1825), in which he said:

Perhaps they [women] are also incapable of long moral or political investigations, where many complex and indeterminate elements are to be taken into account (...) Their proper and natural business is the practical regulation of private life, in all its bearings, affection, and concerns. (1360)

Thanks to those reviews and socially wide spread ideas towards women, female writers faced uncountable difficulties to pursue their dream of becoming artists. What is more, Haley R. Bordo even interprets that those ideas were reinforced by some male romantic poets, who carried behind them thousands of readers that profoundly believed in their words. For instance, Wordsworth who once wrote in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802): "What is a poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to a man." (qtd. in Bordo 1) His constant use of the pronoun 'he' and the word 'man' immediately excludes women, thickens the imaginative wall of the 'writing industry' and is a representation of male-settled conventions. It could be said that the first female author who got some serious attention from readers and critics was Jane Austen. Still, the truth is that, as Stuart Curran affirms: "the late eighteenth century curiously indicates the burst of activity by women writers (...) and how little threat men seemed to have felt at this determined incursion into their realm"(184). Moreover, women cultivated all the styles (poetry, novels of manner, epic) and dealt with a huge variety of ideas: marriage, nature, war, revolution etc.

Consequently, it is right to ask: which were female writers' reactions towards an imposed cultural and social silence? Stuart divides the female authors of this generation between antifeminist and feminist, pointing out as an example of antifeminist Anna Barbauld (186). Surprisingly, I beg to differ in this point with him since I do not classify them in a scale of white and black but rather one of greys. By this I mean that, since Anna Barbauld (and the others) lived in a male-dominated and discriminatory society, their ideas could not always be explicitly exposed and were sometimes highly influenced by their environment. Therefore, in Anna Barbauld works many contradictions regarding women's issues can be seen. Yet, even if she was not as publicly feminist as Mary Wollstonecraft, that does not mean she did not share many

ideas with her. Among them the question of marriage, that both of them regarded as suffocating.

Thanks to the exclusion women were suffering and socio-personal circumstances, they found and exposed topics and issues that interested them: Charlotte Smith wrote novels about the consequences of the European War and the author's inner and outer world; Mary Robinson represented passion, sensibility and London through her life as an independent woman; Felicia Hemans took the conventional male epic genre and made it feminine and sensitive; and Frances Burney represented women's life and struggles in novels of manners.

Additionally, the reader had access to the concerns of women writers. One of those concerns was marriage and the implications it involved. There is not much literature written on the topic; however there is a book worth mentioning: *Marriage, Writing, and Romanticism* (Walker, 2009) since it tackles our two main objects of study (marriage and romanticism) and reviews marriage representations from Jane Austen to Wordsworth. Some scholars have also provided their point of view about the role of marriage in literature. Kate Wilson and Anne Ridler state that marriage in literature "touches upon core issues to do with the integrity of self" (111) While on the one hand it is true that marriage in literature has been used as a tool to deeply develop issues of integrity, there is also another wide spectrum of representations of marriage. The one quickly wide-spread by patriarchal systems is the representation of marriage as a toxic, controlling and essential instrument for women to succeed with the finality to subvert and tame them. That image of marriage was used over centuries, even by women themselves, until they also started to portray it with the intention of making a critique to social and patriarchal conventions. It is fundamental to mention here the works of Jane Austen such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) since she highly contributed to portray new representation of marriage from a women's point of view. Furthermore, her novels were rich in portraying different female perspectives and ideas. Valerie Sanders has rightly pointed out to this use of the marriage in the novel of the nineteenth century:

the literature of 1776-1928 inevitably reflects a wide range of responders to women's experiences, especially of home and family. Marriage is the key theme of the novel of the nineteenth century which records a questioning of society's

assumptions about the appropriateness and availability of marriage, especially for middle class women with aspiration to fulfil themselves in other ways.²

However, in her essay she only focuses on great female novelists of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, my aim is to explore the point of view of those less well-known authors too. Furthermore, I will try to show that marriage is not only depicted in novels but also in poetry (although with less frequency), focusing on feelings and emotions rather than concentrating on social critique of women's role in marriage.

There have also been studies regarding the different perspectives in which marriage is used as a tool to empower women. Thus, some authors argue that women could either stick to stereotypes or reject them and still be empowered. For instance, Kathrin Majic Mazul in her essay about *The Awakening* (Kate Chopin, 1899) and *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë, 1847) says that:

In her novel, *The Awakening* (...) Edna, dismissed the role of a stereotypical mother and a wife by openly showing her sexuality and determination to break the confinements of the society. On the other hand, Brontë's heroine Jane in autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre* showed that women can perform the stereotypical roles expected from them, and be independent and equal to men at the same time. (18)

My perspective will be quite similar since, as I explained before, I don't want my study to be narrow but rather wide taking into consideration all points of view. I consider the marriage spectrum is larger and contains different approaches that can still empower the woman.

² See the abstract of Valerie Sander's *Feminism and Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2016). Available in: <https://www.routledgehistoricalresources.com/feminism/essays/feminism-and-literature-in-the-long-nineteenth-century>
Unfortunately, I could not have access to the whole text.

3. Mary Wollstonecraft: Vision of an Advanced Mind

In 1815, an innovative and revolutionary novel that would catapult its female writer to stardom started to be written. That novel was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly's *Frankenstein*, which is still a worldwide phenomenon. However, what many people do not know is that behind that name there was another that, partly, was Mary Shelley's source of education, knowledge and morality. That other name was Mary Wollstonecraft: promoter of the Romantic Movement, revolutionary, first feminist and, not principally, Mary Shelly's mother. Her literature could be considered to go against the principle of 'art for the art sake' since most of her works were political and sought to educate and vindicate women's rights. Two of her most well-known manifestos are *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Nevertheless, she also wrote two fictional novels *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) and *The Wrongs of Woman or Maria* (1798); although the latter is unfinished. In her fictional novels, she portrayed the issues that she discussed in her manifestos and included some autobiographical accounts. Being a revolutionary and outspoken person, her views about marriage were clearly shown in her works. Therefore, in *Mary, A Fiction* the struggle of friendships as a result of marriage can be seen and *The Wrongs of Woman* deals with an extreme representation of women's struggles due to the patriarchal notion of marriage.

In order to completely understand the ideology and nature behind her works, it is first necessary to know her ideas. On the one hand, as Maria Luz Suárez points out, Mary Wollstonecraft spent some years in France, where she got in contact with new social movements and lifestyles. There, she realised how different women's standards were in England and France (112). On the other hand, whilst staying in France, she was greatly influenced by Rousseau's work and, particularly, by his education method. However, she did not agree with him in everything: Rousseau thought that men's superiority over women was a natural law. Beatriz Viñacas Palomo also notices an influence from the Marquis de Condorcet who "advocated for religious liberty and declared himself an enemy to prejudice and slavery" (49). Therefore, Wollstonecraft's work is, partly, the result of Rousseau's theories that allowed her to criticise and extend his points regarding women:

Procede entonces a demostrar [Rousseau] que la mujer debe ser débil y pasiva, porque posee una fuerza corporal menor que el hombre; y de ahí deduce que ha sido creada para proporcionarle placer y someterse a él, y que su deber es ofrecerse a su dueño como un ser grato, siendo este el gran fin de su existencia. (qtd. in Suárez 116)

Following Rousseau's method and adapting it to her interests, Wollstonecraft stated that women were imprisoned in a world that was designed by men for men without taking into consideration women's interests. Men wanted a certain type of women and a designated place for them inside society. Wollstonecraft thinks that the mean used to achieve this was education: women were educated following men interest and norms. Joaquin M. Aguirre Romero shows Wollstonecraft's ideas by saying that women are educated in sensibility and men in rationality; and consequently, the sensibility education prevented woman from reasoning and perceiving what is relevant and what is not (34-35) Educational change in order to release women was one of her main ideas. Julie A. Monroe rightly remarks these ideas by saying that:

“Masculine” generally referred to such virtues as intelligence, independence, and strength, all those traits that an eighteenth- century woman would be reproached for demonstrating. “Feminine” virtue, on the other hand, was equated with such traits as delicacy, sensitivity, and obedience, terms Wollstonecraft recognized as barely polite euphemisms for weakness, ignorance, and slavery. (149)

She also thought that marriage was a social tool used to control women. Consequently, in her works, she provides a depiction of marriage as an obstacle and weapon to prevent women from freedom and progress. In fact, marriage has such importance in her works as a result of her own experience with it. She had a non-strings relationship with Gilbert Imlay with whom she had a baby. Having a baby outside marriage and as a consequence of the war between Great Britain and France, Imlay registered Wollstonecraft as his wife, although they were not married, in order to avoid social and legal consequences. However, when she later married William Godwin the truth about her fake marriage was exposed and both of them suffered several consequences. All the ideas that have been pointed out can be seen in her non-fictional

works but mainly in *A Vindication of the Rights of the Woman*, her most radical and explicit manifesto.

In her fictional works, as it has already been mentioned, the characters are partially the result of Wollstonecraft's personal experiences and ideas. That is, she portrays herself in them. In *Mary: A Fiction*, her first novel, these autobiographical accounts are constantly perceive. For instance, Mary's rejection towards the conventional notion of marriage and, in particular, towards arranged marriages:

When she was first introduced into the polite circle, she danced with an officer, whom she faintly wished to be united to; but her father soon after recommending another in a more distinguished rank of life, she readily submitted to his will, and promised to love, honour, and obey, (a vicious fool,) as in duty bound. (Wollstonecraft 77-78)

Mary is the perfect embodiment of romantic principles: she frequently discusses about the importance of feeling, passion and nature. Following her romantic principles she constantly daydreams with passionate marriages: "The Platonic Marriage, Eliza Warwick, and some other interesting tales were perused with eagerness. Nothing could be more natural than the development of the passions, nor more striking than the views of the human heart" (80). And she often wonders why she does not have the kind of marriage she desires: "She was jealous, why did he not love her, sit by her side, squeeze her hand, and look unutterable things?" (81) By contrast, Mary often explains how marriage has ruined different women she encounters throughout her life. For instance, she narrates the life of a poor widow who had been "reduced to great distress by the extravagance of her husband; he had destroyed his constitution while he spent his fortune; and dying, left his wife, and five small children, to live on a very scanty pittance" (86). What is more, she describes her own wedding as if it was a torture:

The clergyman came in to read the service for the sick, and afterwards the marriage ceremony was performed. Mary stood like a statue of Despair, and pronounced the awful vow without thinking of it; and then ran to support her mother, who expired the same night in her arms. (95)

Being forced to marry a man she does neither know nor love, Mary grows strong hatred towards her husband and avoids spending time with him. Thus, Mary undergoes a process of realization regarding marriage: going from the ideal notion that she reads in tales to the completely different reality that she faces every day. Once she is married, her perceptions do not change but rather get more negative: "As her mind expanded, her marriage appeared a dreadful misfortune; she was sometimes reminded of the heavy yoke, and bitter was the recollection!" (97); in occasions even comparing marriage to slavery: "She had a reason for not living with her husband, which must some time remind a secret. They stared: Not live with him! How will you live then? (...) I will work, she cried, do anything rather than be a slave" (131).

In the novel, Wollstonecraft does not only portrait women's position towards marriage but also the contemporary social construct of marriage. Particularly, the novel shows society's vision on married woman behaviour: there is a general assumption that if a woman is passionate and does not follow social codes and manners; it means she is not married. Otherwise, she would behave properly. In the following fragment, for instance, some women are gossiping and expressing how negatively surprised they are about the way Mary dresses, since they do not consider it appropriate for a married woman:

I have enquired concerning these strangers, and find that the one who has the most dignity in her manners, is really a woman of fortune." "Lord, mamma, how ill she dresses:" mamma went on; "She is a romantic creature, you must not copy her, miss; yet she is an heiress of the large fortune in shire, of which you may remember to have heard the Countess speak the night you had on the dancing-dress that was so much admired; but she is married. (106)

Finally, there is a new perspective of marriage that, to my knowledge, other authors of Mary Wollstonecraft's era have not depicted and that she introduces in *Mary: A Fiction*: representation of it as an obstacle for male and female friendship. Mary meets a man, Henry, for whom she eventually develops romantic feelings. However, it is before that when she realises she cannot befriend Henry since she is married: "'I cannot see him; he is not the man formed for me to love!" Her delicacy did not restrain her, for her dislike to her husband had taken root in her mind long before she knew Henry" (120). Even though she is not doing anything unmoral, she is indirectly forced

not to have a close friendship with any men but her husband. This aspect increases her anger towards her husband and such is her impotence that the last words in the book, which convey the main message of the novel, are the following: "In moments of solitary sadness a gleam of joy would dart across her mind. She thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage" (148).

Her other novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*, as the title indicates narrates the life stories of some woman that the protagonist, Maria, meets throughout her life. This novel is noticeably posterior to the previous one for its mature criticism. Although *Mary: A Fiction* has a vindictive character, *The Wrongs of Woman* is perceptively much more complex due to Mary Wollstonecraft's life experiences and maturity.

Similarly as in *Mary: A Fiction*, *The Wrongs of Woman* also establishes a hard critique to marriage as it ruins the lives of women. Following the same strategy as in the previous novel in which different women tell their story to the protagonist, the reader is able to identify a common pattern, in all of them, that is, that marriage has been highly harmful in their lives: marriage ruining their lives. For instance, Jemima narrates how her father was abusive and unkind to her mother, what led her to attempt suicide: "My mother grieved to the soul by his neglect, and unkind treatment actually resolved to famish herself; and injured her health by the attempt" (189). Even Maria herself states that: "Marriage had bastilled me for life." (243) Additionally, marriage is also forced upon women and compared to slavery: "She was pretty, with very engaging manners; yet had never an opportunity to marry, excepting to a very old man" (237); "She had been married, against her inclination, to a rich old man, extremely jealous." (176); "I was still a slave, a bastard, a common property." (196); "who have made women the property of their husbands?" (235) However, Mary Wollstonecraft introduces in relation to this point a criticism towards women too by addressing the fact that some 'sell' themselves to marriage in order to be "maintained in idleness" (246). Although Maria admits that she married out of necessity of "having a home at which I would receive them (her sisters)" (237).

In *The Wrongs of Woman* there is also a new perspective of marriage in relation to divorce and immorality. Maria suggests that marriage generates positive social outcomes to men whereas for women these are frequently negative. Moreover, Maria says that marriage leads to immorality now that, in one way or another; women are always the ones to blame in case of failure. In order to support her point, she makes reference to divorce:

The situation of a woman separated from her husband, is undoubtedly very different from that of a man who has left his wife. He, with lordly dignity, has shaken of a clog; and the allowing her food and raiment, is thought sufficient to secure his reputation from taint. (...) A woman, on the contrary, resigning what is termed her natural protector (though he never was so, but in name) is despised and shunned, for asserting the independence of mind distinctive of a rational being, and spurning at slavery.' (246)

In addition, Mary Wollstonecraft also tackles the vision of marriage as an oppressive tool to control wives. Her depiction of marriage corresponds to a contractual silence in which the person signing involuntarily agrees to obey and stay powerless:

He may even spend in dissipation, and intemperance, the very intemperance which renders him so hateful, her property, and by stinting her expenses, not permit her to beguile in society, a wearisome, joyless life; for over their mutual fortune she has no power, it must all pass through his hand. (243)

Consequently, and corresponding to her depiction of marriage, the husband is also commonly portrayed as a “tyrant” and violent being. On the contrary, the lover or friend is shown as a romantic, understanding and loving creature. Following these depictions, it could also be interpreted that Mary Wollstonecraft is suggesting that marriage corrupts men into oppressive figures.

Lastly, there is also a new vision that has been hinted along the paper but not explicitly mentioned until now: that is, the popular notion at that time that women are most useful in marriage. Although the idea is implicit in the fact that women are powerless outside marriage, it is Mary Wollstonecraft who directly mentions it: “The marriage state is certainly that in which women, generally speaking, can be most useful; but I am far from thinking that a woman, once married, ought to consider the engagement as indissoluble (...)” (246).

In short, it can clearly be said that her portrayal of marriage corresponds to the one explored by feminist criticism; that is, power relations and exploration of women representations of marriage. Furthermore, she directly explores women’s feelings and perceptions, introducing numerous points of views. She is also very critical with women and establishes critiques to the passiveness of some regarding their role in marriage and

society. Contrary to women writers of her time, she is very vindictive, direct and smart since she clearly exemplifies all the critiques she introduces in her novels and proposes solutions. It is extremely important to point out the intelligent adaptation that Wollstonecraft carries out of her ideological principles to fictional literature, depicting them in her characters in a way that are very reliable.

4. Frances Burney: Social Realities

Frances “Fanny” Burney (1752-1840) was an English author of what later was defined as novels of manners. She used her novels as a vehicle to show the Eighteenth century society she lived in and raise awareness about it regarding morality and education. To do so, she wrote about what she knew more: women. In fact, her most well-known novels carry the following proper names of individual women: *Evelina* (1778) *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796). She depicted women’s concerns, struggles and desires: “Burney represented the female voice as a voice of value, she fictionalised what is taken to be feminine and was particularly concerned with women’s subordination to men.” (Fernández 111) One of the most common issues in her novels is marriage and sometimes it is even the main plotline as it happens in *Cecilia*. During the XVIII century ideas about marriage were changing but still highly attached to economic and social reasons. As Asunción Aragón points out, Frances Burney, being economically independent from her family and very well-educated since she was a child, had the opportunity to see single women’s difficulties for independence and social double standards. Therefore, her works represent an objective portrayal of reality and domestic life. (*Una imagen propia: la situación de la mujer a través de la obra de Frances Burney* 372)

The depiction of marriage in her works is carried out in several ways. The main depiction is that of marriage as a necessary tool for women to prosper socially and economically. In *Evelina*, her first novel, there is an extreme change of behaviour since the beginning to the end that can be seen in the protagonist. At first Evelina is a pure, innocent girl who does not know the rules of society and is not afraid to express her dislike for men’s treatment of women:

The gentlemen, as they passed and repassed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless, indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense. (n.pag.)

However, living in London soon allows her to get in contact with people from all social classes and learn about morality, social conventions and rules. Thus, she also comes to terms with the struggle for independence that women suffer. In several

occasion she is approached with the question of marriage and the necessity of getting a husband in order to stay in London: “Then they asked me how I liked London? and whether I should not think the country a very dull place, when I returned thither? ‘Miss must try if she can’t get a good husband,’ said Mr. Branghton, ‘and then she may stay and live here.’” (n.pag.) What is more, women are constantly reminded of their economical dependency on their husbands:

(...) Madame Duval, at the instigation of her husband (...) endeavoured to effect a union between Miss Evelyn and one of his nephews. And, when she found her power inadequate to her attempt, enraged at her non-compliance, she treated her with the grossest unkindness, and threatened her with poverty and ruin. (n.pag.)

This depiction shows the little power women had in marriage but at the same time denounces the impossibility for women to progress independently and personally. Asunción Aragón underlines that: “Para Evelina el precio de formar parte de la sociedad, de casarse con el hombre al que ama supone un estancamiento en su personalidad, supone seguir siendo inmadura, inocente e inexperta (...)” (*Una imagen propia: la situación de la mujer a través de la obra de Frances Burney* 374) Even when the female characters are economically sufficient, they are still expected to get married for their husband to arrange the money. On the contrary, if it is the husband the one who owns the money; they hardly ever receive any of it: “And while he continues to persevere in disavowing his marriage with Miss Evelyn, she shall never, at the expense of her mother’s honour, receive a part of her right as the donation of his bounty.” (n.pag.)

Something similar can be seen in *Cecilia*, whose main theme is the economic relationship between women and society. Cecilia is a wealthy woman who is faced with the reality that she cannot be independent without avoiding social speculation about her marital status and economy. People constantly remind her about the lack of possibilities she has in society if she is not married, in spite of the fact that she is rich, and advise her to save the money for a future one: “(...) for as to a lady, let her be worth never so much, she’s a mere nobody, as one may say, till she can get herself a husband, being she knows nothing of business, and is made to pay for everything through the nose” (n.pag.)

Additionally, another theme explored in *Cecilia* is madness and perdition as consequence of social pressure. In the case of Cecilia, she shows signs of insanity due to

different reasons, but one of them is being single. Social pressure regarding her marital status takes her to a state of anxiety: “Almost the first speech which her ladyship made, was ‘So you are not married yet, I find; if Mr Monckton had been a real friend, he would have taken care to have seen for some establishment for you.’” (n.pag.) As a result of being always inquired, she even has a heated conversation with an old man denying the fact that she is married: “They may seem so, Sir; but all conclusions drawn from them will be erroneous. I was not married then, upon my honour!” (n.pag.) one aspect that Kate C. Hamilton interestingly claims is that: “Burney reveals the oppressive qualities of city life for single, and even married women, by portraying the negative effects of romance” (28).

Cecilia could be said to be her more radical novel regarding marriage since already its main theme deals with women’s marital dependency and portrays different perspectives of women. On the contrary, in *Evelina*, the novel and the character Evelina confront the same process of maturity and realization about women marital dependency and place in society. Frances Burney also wrote a play, *The Witlings* (1779), which commonly deals with the issue of single women, social speculation and economic difficulties. This play conveys all the messages and ideas she was trying to transmit in her novels. Kate C. Hamilton establishes similitudes between them and states that: “In *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *The Witlings*, Burney shows how London directly impacts single women’s financial, marital, and social options” (5). She also points out to the fact that “*Cecilia* and *The Witlings*, both (...) feature unmarried heiresses who must confront public speculation regarding their wealth and marital status” (21).

Camilla was her third novel and, even though marriage is not the main plotline, it also deals with the matrimonial concerns of a group of sisters and there is a whole chapter dedicated to the issue of marriage. For instance, Edgar, who is Camilla’s lover, discusses with a friend about women, and admits that women accept marriage because of social pressure; an issue commonly studied by feminist criticism regarding power relations:

Ask half the married women in the nation how they became wives: they will tell you their friends urged them; . . . that they had no other establishment in view; . . . that nothing is so uncertain as the repetition of matrimonial powers in women; . . . and that those who cannot solicit what they wish, must accommodate themselves to what offers. (n.pag.)

Nevertheless, the main theme of *Camilla* is the difference education women and men receive and the roles women are expected to display in society. Regarding this, Asunción Aragón points out that: “el destino de una mujer es incierto, su desenlace depende del “humor de su marido.” (375) Being her third novel, I consider Frances introduces more mature issues such as education instead of merely economic impediments as it happens in her first novels, *Evelina* and *Camila*.

Continuing with her literary tradition, *The Wanderer* (1814), her last novel, also deals with madness and its causes, same as *Cecilia*. Frances Burney spent fourteen years writing this novel and it can be said to be the most “radical” one she has ever written. Indeed, it had a very negative reception within critics because of its portrayal of English society and women; same as it happened to Mary Shelley’s masterpiece *Frankenstein*, which also had a negative reception within critics because of its innovative and critical character. Although *The Wanderer* does not specifically deal with marriage as its main topic, it is presented as a difficulty for women to prosper economically, individually and as a cause of madness.

It should be noted the role of the secondary character, Elinor, in this novel. Even though she is not the protagonist, her role is very significant since she is the representative of women’s rights. Victoria Kortes-Papp has pointed out to a parallelism between Mary Wollstonecraft and Elinor: both share very similar ideas, are very radical and suffer from mental illnesses (99-100). After reflecting about that parallelism, I thought to be very telling not only the fact that Frances Burney decided to use the image of Mary Wollstonecraft, a woman with negative strong opinions about marriage, in her most radical novel that also contains critiques to marriage; but also the numerous similitudes between *The Wanderer* and Wollstonecraft’s last novel *The Wrongs of Woman*: both tackle madness as its main topic, denounce marriage and husbands as a cause of it and portray the difficulties various women have to face and its consequences. Curiously, even the full title of the novels convey the same message and were closely written one after the other: *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) and *The Wanderer: Or, Female Difficulties* (1814).

I consider that the fact that Frances Burney does not concentrate so much on the negative connotations of marriage for women in *The Wanderer* is closely related to her maturity. Peter Barry, in his account of the postcolonial approach to the study of literature, establishes three phases in all postcolonial literature: *Adopt*, *Adapt* and *Adept* phases. The first one consists of “the acceptance of authority of European Models”; The

Adapt phase is a “declaration of cultural independence”; and the last phase, “is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent ‘adept’” (189).

Similarly, as both postcolonial and feminist studies are based on power relationships in which one of the parts exerts its power over the other to oppress it, I have identified these three phases in Frances Burney’s representations of marriage in her works, I have established at least three phases that can be identified in Frances Burney literature with relation to marriage: the ‘acceptance’ (Adopt), the ‘rebellious’ (Adapt) and the ‘mature’ (Adept) phase. In accordance to Peter Barry’s structure, the ‘acceptance’ face could be identified in *Evelina*, her first novel, since it depicts the struggles that unmarried women have to face but Evelina learns to accept that reality. However, the ‘rebellious’ phase can easily be identified in *Cecilia*, since there is a strong criticism towards the damaging influence of marriage on women’s independence. This is seen in the protagonist’s refusal to get married. In a way, Cecilia is declaring her cultural independence from that of patriarchy. Lastly, the ‘mature’ phase is reflected in her last novel, *The Wanderer*, now that Burney instead of radically depict women struggle as a consequence of marriage reverses the situation and introduces a protagonist, Juliet, who is independent, does not have economical resources and has to survive by herself. As Aragón claims:

Frances Burney does not portray Juliet in the model of the typical passive heroine so frequent in fiction. Juliet is not the beautiful princess waiting to be rescued by the charming prince. She is an active woman who, in spite of the different failures to keep each job, tries to be independent over and over again. (*Mary Wollstonecraft and Frances Burney: Strategies in Women’s liberation* 72)

Keeping in mind all that have be seen about Frances Burney, it can be said that she did promote the novel of manners but with a different form: instead of simply portraying society values and moral, she concentrated on women’s perceptions, feelings and preoccupations, with the purpose of giving visibility to them and also vindicate what she thought was women’s rights. As it has been seen, marriage plays a central role in her novels and is depicted as almost the biggest obstacle for a woman in life. While some of her characters learn to accept the connotations that marriage implies, other revel against it. She has proved to be an excellent insightful writer, in the sense that she interprets greatly thoughts, feelings and the consequences social conventions have over

women. The clearest example is *Cecilia*, since the reader grows with her and sees how social pressure and life transport her to a place of madness.

5. Anna Barbauld: Double Standards

Anna Laetitia Barbauld, born Aikin, was the elder daughter of Dr John Aikin and Jane Jennings. She started writing from a young age, being her poem “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” one of her earliest works.³ She was quite a controversial writer because of her outspoken attitude and has been regarded by many critics and authors as the Romantic antifeminist. Yet, the reality is that many critics have pointed out to a fear of being censured and negatively reviewed in case of openly speaking about women rights. For instance, Anne Janowitz in her book *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (2004) notices that female writers founded a coded way in which they presented struggles against patriarchal authority through “the available poetic conventions of sympathy, virtue and responsiveness” and remarks that “women’s interest were suppressed and maimed by patriarchy” (3). Still, she has been regarded as an antifeminist because her ideas were at times contradictory and confusing. One of the statements that gave her that title was her response to a proposal to become Principal of a Ladies College:

A kind of Academy for ladies ... where they are to be taught in a regular manner the various branches of science, appears to me better calculated to form such characters as the *Précieuses* or *Femmes Savantes* than good wives or agreeable companions. The best way for a woman to acquire knowledge is from conversation with a father or brother, and by such a course of reading as they may recommend. . . . (qtd. in Bordo 11)

From that strong statement many presumptions can be made about her ideology. For instance, if nowadays we look at “the good wives or agreeable companion” part, the immediate reaction is to associate it with conservatism. Whilst it is true that Barbauld thoughts seem to be quiet prone to support the conventional understanding of marriage, there is also a subtle critique to the idea of biological essentialism. She seems to reject the idea of women and men being biologically distinct (another essential aspect studied by feminist criticism). From my point of view, she is not trying to reject the idea of women being educated but the fact of them being educated separately from men. Thus, I believe that when she refers to “good wives or agreeable companions”, she is not

³ Wu, Duncan. *Romantic Women Poets*. Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 1997. 7.

trying to say that women should only be taught to be good wives; but rather than men and women should equally be educated as regards literature, science and history together with being good wives and good husbands; that is ethics and moral.

Nevertheless, what it can clearly be seen is the acceptance of the idea of marriage contrary to the previous writers. In fact, Anna Barbauld was married to a minister for many years and found herself trapped in a 'destructive' relationship. Her husband's mental health was delicate and in many occasions he assaulted her. She wrote to him some loving poems such as "To Mr. Barbauld, with a Map of the Land of Matrimony" (1775/1825) but her view about marriage was much complex than those lines. One of the poems that already suggested her conflict about marriage is "To a Little Invisible Being Who is Expected Soon to Become Visible". The poem narrates the pregnancy process and the power of motherhood. However, she excludes the husband role in all that process. In fact, when referring to the countdown for the birth she only mentions the mother and one anxious parent:

For thee the nurse prepares her lulling songs,
The eager matrons count the lingering day;
But far the most thy anxious parent longs
On thy soft cheek a mother's kiss to lay ⁴

Moreover, taking a more insightful look into the poem, it lets the reader see the discomfort towards the pressure, at that time, that women had in the process of pregnancy. This discomfort is emphasized by the terms she uses to describe the future infant: "germ of new life" (199), "living tomb" (200)... and admits only part of herself awaits for them: "She longs to fold to her maternal breast/Part of herself, yet to herself unknown" (200). Sara Dustin shares these ideas and adds that:

While the mother is left behind with her "living tomb," the "little captive" escapes from the "prison" of the mother's womb and makes its way into the world. Barbauld, then, reveals her discomfort with the feminine role of

⁴ From now on I will be quoting from the following edition of Anna Laetitia Barbauld's works: *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld Vol. I: with a Memoir by Lucy Aikin*. London: Richard Taylor, Shoe-Lane, 1825 Number of page will appear parenthetically in the text. This quote is p.200.

motherhood that has been assigned to women since it is a role that keeps them from exploring their own creative powers. (29)

Therefore, the poem implies the discomfort towards the given roles that marriage entails for women and at the same time the happiness of carrying an “infant bud of being” (200).

Nonetheless, her contradictory position regarding marriage arises again in one of her most important poems “Washing Day”. This poem, in a first reading, seems a declaration in favour of the conventional idea of marriage: housewives and patriarchs. The poem starts with the speaker asking the “domestic Muse” to come and “sing the dreaded washing day”. Then, it continues preaching the work of the housewife and portrays their “ancient role” with a flashback of the speaker’s grandmother. Yet, although the tone of the poem seems to be celebratory, it also shows brushstrokes of pessimistic and suffocating feelings. The speaker, by adopting the role of housewife appears to be disappointed at times, not finding comfort either peace:

Too soon; for to that day nor peace belongs,
Nor comfort; ere the first grey streak of dawn,
The red-armed washers come and chase repose.
Nor pleasant smile, nor quaint device of mirth,
Ere visited that day; the very cat,
From the wet kitchen scared, and reeking hearth,
Visits the parlour, an unwonted guest. (203)

I consider there is a persistent irony in the speaker’s voice and reiterations. My interpretation is that she keeps mentioning and describing the housewives tasks as a device to denounce women’s role in traditional marriage. There is such subordination when she says “Vainly he feeds his hopes/With dinner of roast chicken, savoury pie/Or tart or pudding; pudding he nor tart” (205) that it push the limits of mockery:

Looks blank at best, and stinted courtesy
Shall he receive; vainly he feeds his hopes
With dinner of roast chicken, savoury pie,
Or tart or pudding; pudding he nor tart

That day shall eat; nor, though the husband try — (204-205)

In particular, this extract (and also the poem in general) is so narrow-minded and detailed regarding women's task in marriage that it gives me the sense of continuous irony and mockery as a way of denouncing it.

Although in these poems her approach towards marriage is subtly exposed, it was in the essay *Fashion: A Vision* (1826) where she openly expressed her concerns. The essay starts in the form of a letter to one of Mrs. Barbauld female friends regarding a dream about that Barbauld had but quickly turns into a fictional story. In this story, the main theme is the critique to the fashion education that women are forced to adopt. However, Barbauld also opens up about marriage issues that concern women. In fact, the essay begins talking about oppression and how it extends to domestic life:

To break the shackles of oppression, and assert the native rights of man, is esteemed by many among the noblest efforts of heroic virtue; (...) whose jurisdiction is extended over every part of private and domestic life; controls our pleasures, fashions our garb, cramps our motions, fills our lives with vain cares and restless anxiety. (165)⁵

Later on, as it happens in *Washing Day*, the presence of man and more particularly of a husband is erased from the story. There is a queen, but unusually there is not king. In the times Anna Barbauld lived, the common thing was to get married at a young age and obey the husband's orders. Anna herself states that in her story: "When a young woman approaches the marriageable age, she is led to the altar" (176) the same was obviously expected from a queen. However, there is not king by her side, only "profusion of the richest productions of every quarter of the globe" (170). Notwithstanding, it is later on when she explicitly criticises the matrimony ceremony and what marriage socially implies for women. In the following extract, she starts criticising the marital ceremony and, mainly, the fact that women are forced to get married at a young age and obligated to stick to strict beauty standards:

⁵ From now on I will be quoting from the following edition of Anna Laetitia Barbauld's works: *A Legacy for Young Ladies, consisting of Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse, by the late Mrs. Barbauld*. London: Richard Taylor, Shoe-Lane, 1826.
Number of page will appear parenthetically in the text. This quote is p.165.

When a young woman approaches the marriageable age, she is led to the altar: her hair, which before fell loosely about her shoulders, is tied up in a tress, sweet oils drawn from roses and spices are poured upon it; she is involved in a cloud of scented dust, and invested with ornaments under which she can scarcely move. (176)

Although this quote can be interpreted as a general criticism to the fashion standards imposed on women, it is very significant the fact that she uses marriage to illustrate the idea; which implies that it is after marriage when women have to adequate even more to beauty standards. This is confirmed later on when she says:

After this solemn ceremony, which is generally concluded by a dance round the altar, the damsel is obliged to a still stricter conformity than before to the laws and customs of the court, and any deviation from them is severely punished. (176-177)

Since she is narrating an episode that is set within the royalty, she uses the term court as the ones who impose the norm on the 'already' wife. Translating that into general terms, court is synonym of society. Thus, Anna Barbauld is negatively pointing out the fact that social conventions imposed beauty standards on women and, specially, after they were married. Sara Dustin explains that:

The social constraints that a married woman must operate under in Barbauld's vision, and which Barbauld clearly questioned, were enacted in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England, where women had no legal rights and where husbands retained control over their wives' property and finances. (23-24)

Moreover, when comparing similar ideas between Mary Wollstonecraft and Anna Barbauld, she goes further and points out that "in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and Barbauld's *Fashion: A Vision*, both writers link marriage to a system of slavery that persists in oppressing women" (22). Whilst in my opinion comparing marriage to slavery is too exaggerated, I can see the point where that opinion comes from. Nevertheless, I differ in that comparison in the point that slaves hardly ever, I would dare to say never, agreed to be slaves, on the contrary some women (although

sometimes corrupted by patriarchal ideas) agreed with the conventionalism of marriage and women's status in society. Moreover, I don't think Anna Barbauld was intending to compare marriage with slavery at any moment but rather note educational and social faults and differences between genders.

Taking into consideration the works that have been analysed I think it can clearly be said that although Anna Barbauld perception about marriage can sometimes be interpreted as 'traditional', there is an evident conflict towards it and what it socially meant for women. Whilst she does not reject at all the idea of marriage, she rejects the beauty and role conventions that women are forced to take. To show that, she excludes men from the domestic sphere which reinforces the fact that domestic tasks and, even infant care, are placed on wives and not husbands. Additionally, she also invalidates the presence of men in the reign and instead introduces a queen surrounded by wealth. Conventionally it would be the reverse situation, a king surrounded by wealth and a wife by his side. Thus, the fact that Anna Barbauld reverses the story, in my opinion, is an attempt to show women's power invalidation in marriage. Lastly, she directly shows women's oppression and discomfort with their obligations in marriage by pointing out the punishments they suffer in case of disobedience.

6. Conclusion

Along this essay it has been possible to have an insightful look at some of the most relevant fictional works by Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Burney and Anna Barbauld. Thanks to that, female writer's interests and literature have been analysed: one of the most relevant aspects has been marriage but it has also been seen that friendship, passion, human relationships and nature play a big role. Therefore, answering to the question regarding if female authors tackle similar issues as their male fellows, it can be said that in many cases they do since both groups highly influenced by the romantic movement principles; however, female authors have given a whole new perspective of issues such as marriage or war.

Moreover, as the male figures, some women, as Mary Wollstonecraft, were rebellious and reactionaries whereas others opted for indirect rebellion as Anna Barbauld since their career could be negatively affected. It is also of great importance the fact that these writers show signs of avoidance of "male canon literature" and try to be innovative and, in my opinion, create a female distinguished female body of literature. In addition, in my dissertation I have also pointed out women's discomfort and contradictory feelings to the conventional idea of marriage, probably as a result of the social pressure suffered for decades.

Thus, it is important to notice that female and male writers seem to differ in the notion of marriage that they share in their works: as it has been mentioned in the theoretical framework, men show a significantly positive view whereas women tend to have a rather negative one. There is also a wide gap between male and female expression: particularly in the case of Anna Barbauld, whose writing is less explicit than those of male figures out of fear of not being successful. What is more, Mary Wollstonecraft's novels were poorly successful and negatively reviewed as consequence of her explicitness and public denounce.

The close relationship between postcolonial and feminist studies has also been addressed. In fact, it has been possible to establish a direct relation in the process of writing of post-colonial writers and female authors. That establishes a similar process that oppressed groups go through when writing. Additionally, theory approaches to exclusion of small groups such as *Orientalism* have also been related to women and their place in writing. Additionally, it has also been possible to identify a great influence of Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas on Frances Burney, although much less radical than her

mentor. Anna Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft had numerous conflicts with each other as a result of their opposite mentality; however, it has been proved that they shared many ideas not only regarding marriage, but also regarding gender roles and education, since both of them thought that after marriage women were forced to take certain attitudes and that education should be equal for men and women.

That is a body of works by women that show certain common concerns even though they approach them in a different manner, in a more or less open way, with a more or less rebellious attitude. Even though, there are certain resemblances between male and female writing, the interest and preoccupations clearly differ in many ways. Also, due to the high recurrence of the topic of marriage in female writing, I consider it should be included as one of the most important notion in this canon. Nevertheless, there are still many lines of research that could be studied after this investigation. For instance, in the case of Mary Wollstonecraft, it would be interesting to see a comparison between her personal accounts and the depiction of those in her novels as well as the way in which those accounts shaped her principles. Also, since I have been able to identify certain influence of Wollstonecraft in Frances Burney's work, it would be interesting to find other examples of female authors in which she had some influence on.

Regarding Frances Burney, since her works are very extensive and complex, a study could be carried out about the different points of view of male and female characters about marriage. Also, I have noticed in her works a constant parallelism between women of different social classes and her lives being equally dependent on marriage. Thus, it would be compelling to carry out a study of the impact of belonging to a certain social class in female characters. In the case of Anna Barbauld, since much literature has been written about her ideology as represented in her works, an interesting approach would be to study marriage representations in female romantic poetry in order to see the ways in which it differs with prose representations.

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